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SUBJECT: HUNGARY'S GMO BAN WILL STAY

11. Summary: On January 29, Hungarian daily "Vilagazdasag" reported that Undersecretary of Agriculture Zoltan Gogos announced that Hungary will continue its ban on the importation of genetically modified corn and the planting of genetically modified organism (GMO) seeds. This announcement follows the European Commission's (EC) second call for Hungary to lift its GMO ban entirely. The Ministry of Agriculture's position reflects the consensus view of the five major Hungarian parties. The European Commission's Environment Council, composed of Environment Ministers, will discuss the Hungarian case in March 2009. End summary.

12. In 2005, Hungary, one of the region's biggest grain producers, became the first country in Eastern Europe to ban GMO crops and foods when it outlawed the planting of MON 810 maize seeds, which are marketed by the U.S. biotech company Monsanto. The justification for the ban was that letting MON 810 hybrids into the market would hinder the development of traditional domestic seed production.

13. Last week, the European Commission for the second time called on Hungary to entirely lift its GMO ban. Gogos reportedly said the EC's call on Hungary to reverse its stance on the issue arises from both lobbying and the EU's rejection of scientific evidence presented by Hungary. He added that in the past few years concerned GMO companies have also endeavored to convince the Agriculture Ministry directly to lift the moratorium.

14. The EC Environment Council is expected to discuss the Hungarian case in March 2009. Gogos reportedly believes that there is a chance that Hungary will be able to gather sufficient support to block a qualified majority vote in favor of the EC position.

15. In spite of the Hungarian parliamentary consensus, some domestic cereal producers support lifting the GMO ban. The pro-GMO camp believes that EU member states that plant GMO corn will have a competitive advantage due to lower costs. According to the report, Gogos claims that, although there is no consensus among Hungarian producers, opponents to GMOs outnumber proponents.

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